

Montana YMCA Youth & Government Program

Parties & Elections

2006 Edition

“Democracy must be learned by each generation.”

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Overview

Participation in the electoral process is a right of every adult American. At the Montana YMCA Youth and Government Program, all participants choose the leaders of the next year's session, pass laws via ballot issues, and have the opportunity to learn about how the political party system works.

Montana's program is unique. We are one of the only model government programs in the nation to use real world political parties as part of our process, with a Third Party program that is unparalleled. We are also one of the few programs to give all participants an opportunity to model the citizens' initiative and referenda process that is such an active part of real Montana statewide elections.

This section of the Youth and Government manual will cover all areas of the program which involve Political Parties and Elections.

Ballot Issues: Initiatives and Referenda

The Montana YMCA Youth and Government Program offers Lobbyists, Reporters, Pages, Attorney and other non-legislators the chance to have their say through the use of Ballot Issues.

What are Ballot Issues?

There are two types of Ballot issues: ***Initiatives*** and ***Referenda***. These are real world ways of putting laws and amendments to the Montana Constitution on the ballot for the people to decide. The Montana Constitution allows voters to take any legislatable act to the ballot, except for an appropriation of money. [Article III] Section 4 of the Montana constitution says: Initiative. (1) The people may enact laws by initiative on all matters except appropriations of money and local or special laws.

An ***initiative*** is an act of legislation that bypasses the legislature and goes directly to the people for a vote. Individual citizens can introduce an Initiative to change a law or amend the Montana Constitution. To get it on the ballot, it requires a certain amount of signatures from registered voters.

A ***referendum*** is an act of the legislature that is put to a popular vote. It is the required method for a legislature-drafted amendment to the Montana Constitution, but the legislature can decide to put ordinary acts to the voters as well (especially really controversial ones). A Referendum has to pass the Legislature by a 2/3 majority. If it does, it goes to the qualified electors of the state of Montana, *i.e.* the voters.

Initiatives and Constitutional Initiatives

Any participant in the Montana YMCA Youth and Government Program can create a ballot initiative, however:

- Legislators **may not** substitute an initiative for their bill writing requirement.
- Lobbyists **may** submit an initiative with a “pro” argument in lieu of a lobbyist paper.

Initiatives must be composed and submitted prior to the session by the March 1 bill deadline and will appear in the billbook.

A sample initiative follows this section.

The Initiative needs:

- A Statement of Purpose for the petition and ballot. The statement should not exceed 50 words.
- The EXACT language as it will appear on the ballot.
- The actual law to be changed or added.
- An argument FOR the proposed initiative between 150 and 200 words long.

When participants register for the session, petitions will be picked up by the authors of the initiatives and they can begin gathering signatures.

Individuals interested in writing a 150-200 word statement AGAINST the initiative may do so and submit it to the Youth and Government Secretary of State by the announced deadline for publication in the session newspaper.

Petition signatures:

- 35% of all registered delegates must sign the petition for an Initiative to qualify for the ballot.
- 45% of all registered delegates must sign the petition for a Constitutional Initiative to qualify.
 - *For example:* if there are 400 registered delegates, a regular initiative will require 140 signatures and a Constitutional initiative will require 180 signatures.
- Petition signatures must include members of at least 1/2 (2/3 for amendment) of the delegations and no more than 50% can be from legislators (i.e. House, Senate and First Year House members combined)
- The Secretary of State (SOS) will certify all petitions meet above criteria.
- Petitions are due by the announced deadline.
- Qualifying initiatives will appear on the ballot at the general election for voter approval.

(Sample Initiative)

Susie Doe
Two Dot YMCA

PETITION TO PLACE INITIATIVE _____
ON THE MONTANA YMCA YOUTH AND GOVERNMENT ELECTION BALLOT

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: This initiative will require that all pet owners spay or neuter any dog or cat that is not a registered breeding animal. Current law only requires that animals offered for adoption through an animal shelter be spayed or neutered.

BALLOT LANGUAGE: The above statement of purpose will be printed on the ballot along with the following:

[] FOR requiring that all pet owners spay and neuter any dog or cat that is not a registered breeding animal.

[] AGAINST requiring that all pet owners spay and neuter any dog or cat that is not a registered breeding animal.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE YOUTH OF MONTANA:

NEW SECTION. **Section 1. Required Spaying or Neutering of Cat or Dog.** All dogs or cats in the State of Montana must be spayed or neutered:

- (a) within 30 days of purchase or adoption if the animal is more than 6 months old at the time obtained; or
- (b) by the time the animal reaches the age of 6 months if the animal is less than 6 months old at the time obtained.

NEW SECTION. **Section 2. Exceptions.** Dogs and Cats that are registered by a recognized breed registry and intended for use as breeding animals are exempt from this requirement.

NEW SECTION. **Section 3. Penalties.** Individuals who do not spay or neuter their pets as outlined in section 1 above shall constitute a misdemeanor.

Section 4. Adoption of cat or dog from humane society, animal shelter, or pound penalty. Section 7-23-4202 is amended to read:
7-23-4202 (3) ~~The deposit must be forfeited if the spaying or neutering is not done.~~ The dog or cat owner shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor if the spaying or neutering is not done:

NEW SECTION. **Section 5. Effective Date.** This act is effective upon approval by the electorate.

SUPPORTING STATEMENT:

There are too many unwanted dogs and cats in Montana. Unwanted pets run wild, carrying disease, fighting with the beloved pets of others, and sometimes attacking people. While current law tries to limit the number of unwanted pets, it makes no provision for pets that are adopted as strays by individuals, for pets born to animals that were not adopted from an animal shelter, or for pets purchased from a Pet Shop. Furthermore, the current penalties for people who do not spay or neuter their pets under existing law are too lenient they only lose the deposit they put down at the animal shelter. In short, existing law has been using a carrot approach to encourage responsible pet ownership, but it hasn't worked. Now it is time for a stick. This initiative will not only extend current law to cover all pets that are not being used for legitimate breeding purposes, but also put some teeth into existing law.

Referenda

There are usually at least 8-10 Legislative Acts per year that are introduced in referendum form. Putting these referenda on the ballot if passed is the correct way to follow up this type of legislation.

When are Referenda required?

Bills introduced in the Youth Legislature that will amend the Montana Constitution **must** be submitted in Referendum form (Check the Bill Writing Guide to see how this is done)

Members of the Youth Legislature will not normally introduce ordinary bills in referenda form. The reason for this is that in a real legislative body, most acts that change ordinary statutes (laws) are only put on the ballot under two conditions, neither of which generally applies to Youth and Government participants:

1. When there is something so controversial or highly publicized about the act that voter approval is considered a good idea to avoid anger at members of the legislature.
2. When the statute overturns or changes an initiative earlier passed by the voters.

Rules for Referenda

- All Referenda must pass the Legislature by a 2/3 majority vote. This means 100 Legislators total, not 2/3 of each chamber. (This is in accordance with the Montana Constitution)
- An introduced bill that is not a Constitutional Amendment may only be amended into an voter referendum in Committee, same as all other bill amendments.
- *Note:* Referenda are NOT initiatives. *Initiatives do not go into the legislature at all. One collects signatures from the people to get Initiatives on the ballot.*
- All referenda are placed at the front of the respective dockets of each committee. When the Secretary of State (SOS) gets those which pass from committee, s/he will promptly notify Speaker/President that they have referenda to consider, and those officers will place them early on the docket.
- Transmittal deadline for referenda is earlier than for other bills and will be announced at the session. Deadline for referenda to be *passed* by a 2/3 majority of all members of both chambers is the same as the *transmittal* deadline for all other bills.
- Referenda passed by the legislature will appear on the general election ballot for voter approval.

The Party System

“Liberty is to faction what air is to fire.”

~James Madison

Why a Partisan System?

- Because we believe principled differences of opinion are an important part of the democratic process.
- Because we believe that conflicting viewpoints, peacefully and respectfully expressed, help lead everyone to a fuller understanding of the issues.
- Because it helps us better understand what we believe as individuals.
- Because it teaches us how to peacefully confront and then resolve our differences.
- Because creating workable compromises is an integral part of the American system, dating back to the writing of our constitution.
- Because it gives us a more realistic model of how the real legislative process works.
- Because it teaches us what the different political parties stand for.
- Because it helps us learn about the purpose and duties of political parties.
- Because it's fun!

History

Montana YMCA Youth and Government has had liberal and conservative parties in our program since 1980, and actual Republican and Democratic parties since 1983.

When real parties were introduced, it was in order to create a more realistic model and to guide the coalitions that inevitably form. This policy of realism has enjoyed widespread support among the youth participants because it helps them more fully understand how the political system actually works.

The third party program, like real third parties, developed as a protest movement among participants when the mainstream parties were unresponsive to the interests of some participants. Third parties appeared in the Montana YMCA Youth Legislature in 1985 and a third party first successfully elected candidates to office in 1994.

Overview

Participants serve not only as legislators or lobbyists, but as members of the Republican, Democratic, or other third parties as interest warrants. Party preference is based entirely on personal choice; all participants are free to express their own political opinions. *No one* can require a participant to choose one political party over another.

Legislators and lobbyists declare a party preference. Legislators must do this because real Legislators run under a party affiliation of some sort. Even real world independent candidates have a party of supporters and a platform of their public statements.

Party affiliation is required of lobbyists at Youth and Government because lobbyist participants can move up into legislator seats if there are vacancies. Having a declared party affiliation helps speed the process of determining majority and minority status prior to the start of business. It is also a way to model the way real lobbyists have professional and political affiliations that are publicly known.

Some people do not want to be affiliated with a mainstream party, and the third party program exists to allow all participants to have a way to declare their positions.

Attorneys, reporters and pages are presumed to be nonpartisan and may choose to actively support a party or not.

Just as in the real Montana election, the Chief Justice is elected as a nonpartisan position, but all other elected officials run with a party affiliation.

How the Party System Works

Choosing Party Affiliation

As previously mentioned, participants choose their political party based on their own personal convictions and beliefs. Party affiliation is not to be coerced by advisors, sponsors or peers.

It is strongly recommended that all participants read the party platforms so that they make an informed choice.

All party platforms available to the state office are available on the website. The Republican and Democratic platforms are always sent out, along with any third party platforms submitted.

The Republican and Democratic parties are automatically recognized by the Montana YMCA Youth and Government Program, the same as they are recognized on the ballot by the State of Montana. If a participant wants to be a Democrat or a Republican, all he or she needs to do is to declare his or her party at registration.

The first year a third party is at the conference, party leaders have to produce and turn in a party platform by the announced deadlines in order to be recognized. Subsequent years, the third party platform will be kept on file and republished with the others.

All recognized parties may caucus, elect party floor leaders, and run candidates for office.

Important: Party preference is a matter of individual choice. Delegations cannot require their members to be of one party or another, cannot register their entire delegation as one party, nor

decide that a given number of members must be of a certain party. Advisors are not to assign party affiliation to participants.

Why can't people just be independents? Unlike ordinary citizens, Legislators cannot simply be independents without creating a platform because that denies the public its right to know the positions of its elected officials. On the other hand, participants are *not* required to vote the positions or ticket of the party they declare. They can cross party lines on any vote, and they have a secret ballot in the elections that, just like Montana's real elections, allows them to vote for whomever they wish.

If a student or a group of students does not wish to identify with either major party, they are welcome to form a third party.

Majority/Minority Status:

The House, Senate and First Year Legislature determine majority and minority party status by the declared party preferences of the members of each chamber. Membership of each chamber is determined by the official registration list as of the first day of the session. (Due to drops and no-shows, party numbers cannot be finalized until final registration is complete.)

To minimize peer pressure, party affiliation is determined by the party preferences stated by participants *when they preregister*. Once registration is finalized, majority status for each Chamber is announced at the first party caucuses.

Some years, one party may control both chambers; other years may have mixed leadership with the House controlled by one party and the Senate by another. Majority status is often decided by a very close margin!

The majority party does not really have a lot of special power (other than numbers) at Youth Legislature, but the majority leaders do serve as floor leaders during sessions of the House and Senate.

Platforms

Platforms aren't a strait jacket. Both Republicans and Democrats pride themselves on being a big tent where many viewpoints can be heard. People in a party don't all march in lock step and neither do people in the Youth Legislature!

For example, some Republicans are Pro-Choice, some Democrats are Pro-Life. People choose whichever party comes the closest to their own values MORE of the time, but seldom will a person agree with their party ALL of the time!

Participants are strongly encouraged to read at least the Montana Democratic and Republican party platforms (links to each are on the website) so that an intelligent party choice is made. Most national third parties also publish their party platforms.

Caucuses and Party Leadership

Each day of the session, time is set aside for party caucuses. The first time that caucuses are held, a floor leader and party whip are chosen for each chamber by each party.

The Republican and Democratic caucuses also choose one member from the House and one from the Senate to serve on the Escort Committee, who accompanies special guests into the Chambers.

Until the leaders are chosen, the caucus will be led either by the most senior elected official of that party, or if there is no elected officer of that party, the program office will appoint an experienced participant to open the caucus.

Once elected, the Senate Floor Leaders preside over the caucuses, which are open to the press and public, where they decide on party strategies, choose bills to support, drum up support for candidates, and take care of other tasks.

Third parties may caucus on their own if they submitted a party platform. When there are guest speakers in the major party caucuses, or when candidates for office speak in the caucuses, third parties to the left of center may caucus with the Democrats and third parties to the right of center may caucus with the Republicans.

Individuals may leave their caucus to attend another one, but may not vote there unless they have officially changed their party affiliation at the program office.

Roles of Party Leaders

Party Leaders:

These are the principal leaders, spokespersons, and strategists for each party in a given chamber. They also gather political intelligence on pending legislation with the help of party whips.

Party leaders sometimes coordinate activities with the leaders of other parties, especially matters of protocol, privilege and procedure. They also coordinate party activities with the party leadership of the other chamber, especially during transmittal.

The Party Leader of the party with the most members in the chamber (House or Senate) is called the Majority Leader; the remaining floor leaders are called Minority Leaders.

Whips:

These are members who serve as assistants to the majority or minority leaders. The Majority Whips and the Minority Whips monitor the positions of their party's members on issues, maintain vote counts, seek to persuade their members to vote with the party, and round them up for important votes. ***Whips are reminded that members do have the right to vote against the party's official position if they so choose and that threats or intimidation are not a good strategy for long-term party unity (and violate the Code of Conduct)!***

Special Duties of the Majority Leader:

The Majority Leader not only leads his or her own party, but, in the role of Floor Leader, is the Presiding Officer's principal assistant who also helps the business of the entire Chamber flow smoothly. The Floor Leader makes procedural motions at the appropriate time (as outlined in the Youth Legislature Section of the Manual), and coordinates with the Minority Leader(s) on relevant issues.

The majority leader, while a partisan position, needs to also support the best interests of the Chamber as a whole.

Third Parties and Platforms

People who don't care for either party need to know not just what they are AGAINST, but also what they are FOR. A written platform is a good way to think about one's beliefs and put them in order so others will understand them.

Participants may form their own unique party and write their own platform, or they can declare as members of a nationally known third party and condense the official platform of that party down to one page.

Why require a party platform?

The main reason is that the people have a right to know where a candidate or a public office holder stands. In the real world, the platforms of the Republican and Democratic parties are widely published and it is fairly easy to learn what the two major parties stand for. Third parties are not as well known, and they need to do a bit more to get their message out.

Even so-called Independent candidates have opinions! They essentially write a platform as they campaign and make their opinions known to the public.

In the Youth Legislature, third party candidates and legislators make their positions known by having their party platform published in the billbook so everyone knows where they stand on the major issues.

Of course this extra work isn't quite fair to third parties. However, neither is the American system. It is realistic for members of a third party to have to jump through a few more hoops in order to participate. This happens to third parties in the real world as they work to gain access to the ballot and to elective office. It's easier to form a third party at Youth and Government than in the real world, actually!

There are many third parties active in the United States: Just ask the Greens, the Libertarians, the Socialists, the Reform Party, or anyone else. They all will be glad to tell you where they stand! Most party platforms are now available on the Internet.

Writing a Third Party Platform:

Party platforms are printed in the billbook and are due at the announced deadline. They must meet the following criteria:

- No more than one page long. Platforms must be typed or done on a computer. No hand-written copies.
- Express what the party is for without attacking the views of other parties. Platforms with inflammatory language will be returned for a rewrite that uses more diplomatic terms.
- If a party misses the deadline, they may still form if they write a platform, print up enough copies for all participants at their own expense, and submit them to the program office.
- Third parties that want to recruit more members may submit their platforms by the announced prior to preregistration and have them distributed to all delegations along with the GOP and Democratic platforms.

Suggestions on Platform Style

The most effective platforms are clearly understood and easy to read. A good platform has the following elements:

- An opening **Preamble** telling about the broad principles of the party and what it stands for.
- Specific **planks** taking positions on the most important issues of the day.
- A **closing statement** with a call to action outlining, in general terms, what the party plans to do.
- Sometimes an **invitation** for others to join is included.

A Sample Platform follows on the next page:

Sample Party Platform

Common Sense Party Platform

We, the people of the Common Sense Party, tired of partisan infighting and the childlike bickering that prevents work on the real, pressing issues that affect us today, offer the following platform to restore Common Sense and Good Will to the process of Government.

We believe that Government is neither the problem nor the solution to issues of the day, but rather is a tool that we use to address the issues that concern us all. It can be used wisely or poorly, depending on the skill of those who wield it.

Agriculture

Agriculture is the backbone of the Montana economy, and we support efforts to help Family Farms thrive.

Education

Youth are our future, and we support increased funding for public education. We oppose vouchers for private school tuition because this takes away the tax base of public schools, but support the rights of private school students to participate in the extracurricular activities of public schools because their families do pay taxes to support public schools.

Natural Resources and Economic Development

We believe that a balance between use and preservation of natural resources must be maintained, and that the best way to do so is to support funding for scientific studies so that the true costs and benefits of various policies can be known. Jobs for people must be weighted against environmental degradation in a common sense way that looks at the real facts objectively

Social Welfare

No one in Montana should go without food, shelter and the necessities of life. However, people should not be allowed to become dependent on handouts. Therefore, we support efforts to help people in time of need, while encouraging them to become self-sufficient. We support increased funding for job training programs and child care, but oppose higher spending on public assistance.

Human Rights

We believe that all people should be treated equally regardless of race, gender, religion or sexual orientation. We support equal opportunity in hiring and promotion, which sometimes may mean hiring preferences to counteract past discrimination, but oppose numerical quotas or hiring of less qualified people over more qualified people.

Criminal Justice

Most convicted criminals will return to society some day. For that reason, we believe that a balance must be struck between punishment and rehabilitation of criminals. We believe that criminals should be quickly and firmly punished and not let off with a warning. We also support efforts to keep first time offenders out of prison through alternative sentencing so that they don't learn to become better criminals by exposure to hardened convicts. We also support restorative justice.

Taxation

We accept the notion that taxes are the price of civilization but that doesn't mean we like them. We neither support nor oppose new taxes in a knee-jerk manner, but consider every new tax or fee based on whether it is truly needed and the most cost-effective thing to do over the long run. We oppose being penny wise and pound foolish.

Foreign Policy

We support the efforts of the United States government to create a peaceful world, and oppose excessive military spending. We believe that foreign aid should only be given to make other nations more stable and less likely to be violent towards their own people or other nations. We support free trade most of the time, but believe that human rights violations should be penalized.

In conclusion, we urge civility, common sense, a calm eye to the facts and intelligent discussion in all public decision-making. We encourage anyone who supports our vision of a sensible world to join our party.

Election Information

The following officials are currently elected during the Montana YMCA Youth and Government Session:

- Youth Governor*
- Lieutenant Governor*
- Chief Justice of the Model Supreme Court
- Speaker of the House
- President of the Senate
- Secretary of State

** Governor and Lieutenant Governor run as a team and are elected on a single ticket. These individuals must be from different delegations.*

Additional elected positions may be added some years, or changes in the program may result in a cutback of elected positions to appointed ones.

People elected each year serve for the following year.

About Elections

The Elections Process

The Primary Election on Monday afternoon and a General Election on Tuesday night (during the Banquet and Dance). Our elections are open to all youth participants registered for the program.

The Secretary of State is the chief elections official for the Montana YMCA Youth and Government Program and oversees the elections with the assistance of an adult advisor.

Just like the real elections process in the state of Montana, our primary is a closed party primary, where people choose and vote only one ticket, with party affiliation chosen on a secret ballot.

Just like the statute in Montana Code Annotated (13-10-209. Arrangement and preparing of primary ballots.) If no more than one candidate files for nomination by a party, that office will appear on that party's ballot as "uncontested." The lone candidate running for that office in that party will automatically advance to the General Election.

Our General Election, where people can vote for the candidate of their choice from any party, also includes awards voting for outstanding legislators, reporters, lobbyists, and other honors.

Running for Office, Step-by-Step

1. File for Office: At registration on Sunday afternoon, you pick up a nomination petition at the elections table. You declare your party affiliation, the office you are running for, and, if you are running for Governor or Lt. Governor, you also name your running mate. The deadline for filing will be announced ahead of time.

2. Attend the candidate's workshop. This workshop is mandatory.
3. Get Nominated: You have to obtain signatures on your nomination petition from 10% of the registered student participants, and from at least four different delegations. Be sure to turn in your petition by the announced deadline, which is usually about the time the party caucuses meet.
4. Give a Primary Election Speech: During the first party caucuses, you give a ONE MINUTE campaign speech to members of your party. (Third party candidates, if any, may also speak, with schedule and place to be decided by the program staff)
5. Meet the Press: There is a press conference for all candidates on Sunday evening and the press then publishes a voter's guide based on these interviews Monday prior to the election.
6. Promote Your Candidacy: You may hang up posters in designated areas (Because it is a delicate, historic building **no tape is allowed at the Capitol!**) You may also hand out flyers, pins, badges, or other small inexpensive items (guideline: items should be less than 5¢ each!) Don't forget to introduce yourself to people and shake hands!
7. Vote in the Monday afternoon primary election. You run against other candidates within your own political party.

If you win the Primary, you advance to the General Election!

General Election Procedures

1. Winners of the Primary have another press conference, may keep their posters up, distribute more doodads, and keep on campaigning!
2. Fire Up the Troops: Be prepared to speak briefly at your party's Tuesday caucus to help fire up the people in your party to stick together and vote for you. Reach out to those people you defeated in the primary and invite them to unify behind your candidacy.
3. The short speech: You will give a(nother) ONE MINUTE speech during the Tuesday Joint Session.
4. The BIG speech: You will give a THREE MINUTE speech at the Tuesday night banquet, plus be subjected to...
5. The Candidates' Forum: The current Youth Governor will moderate questions from members of the audience. By tradition, these questions will cover both serious issues and a few humorous inquiries. Be prepared to discuss anything from abortion to alien invasions! (The most famous of the humorous questions is the classic, if you were a fish, what kind of a fish would you be, and why).
6. Vote in the Tuesday night General Election, held after the speeches, during the dance.

If you are elected...

All officers participate in meetings that begin in December to help organize next year's Youth and Government Program.

The Youth Governor is also an ex-officio member of the Montana YMCA Youth and Government Program Board of Directors for the year s/he serves.

Campaign Rules

Remember the Rules! We only have a few:

1. Please do not place anything with an adhesive on any surface at the Capitol! It is a historic building and adhesives of any sort can harm the surfaces there. Be respectful with campaign materials.
2. Be ethical and honorable. No negative campaigning. Promote yourself honestly, don't run down others.
3. Leave other people's campaign materials alone. Defacing property is against the code of conduct (AND it reflects negatively on YOUR character!)
4. Place posters only in designated areas.
5. Pick up your campaign materials after the elections. Don't create litter.

Campaign Guidelines

How will you let people know you are running? Create a campaign strategy!

- There are several ways to advertise. You may try any of the following:
- Flyers distributed to participants
- Buttons or stickers for your supporters (remember to remind people to put stickers *only* on themselves or their property and *not* on any surface of the Capitol!)
- You may put up a maximum of 2 posters. They may only be placed on the bulletin boards in the Snack bar area (do not tape anything anywhere!)
- Other goodies and doodads costing less than 5¢ each.
- Best of all: talk to people and ask them to vote for you!

Scholarships

There are funds budgeted each year to provide scholarship money for Montana Youth and Government participants to participate in National Events. The amount of money available varies from year to year.

The Youth Governor receives a partial scholarship toward attending the National YMCA Youth Governor's Conference held in Washington, D.C. in mid-June.

The Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate receive partial scholarships toward attending the YMCA Youth Conference on National Affairs (CONA) held in Black Mountain, North Carolina in late June.

Other interested elected officers receive first priority for additional partial scholarships toward attending CONA, when available.